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Strategies for Reducing Civil Servant Turnover Within the U.S. Federal Government

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tewanda Wooten

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Strategies for Reducing Civil Servant Turnover Within the U.S. Federal Government

by

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MS, Trident University International, 2008

BS, University of Maryland, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2020

Abstract

Voluntary turnover has increased in the United States federal government in recent decades. Employees are voluntarily leaving organizations sooner than expected, leaving the remaining employees to complete their tasks and posing a possible loss of revenue until the employee is replaced or retrained. The purpose of this study was to understand the reasoning behind the upward trend in turnover rates within the federal government and assist with strategies to retain government employees in the future. Herzberg's two-factor theory was used as the theoretical framework to heighten understanding of the high levels of turnovers within the federal government. The primary research questions centered on ascertaining former federal employees' lived experiences and the factors that influenced them to depart their organization. The sample consisted of 17 former government employees who departed between 1999-2019. Semi structured interviews were conducted telephonically, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Four themes were revealed: job dissatisfaction, compensation and benefits, promotion and growth ability, and organizational leadership influences. The recommendations based on this study are that organizations should provide better compensation packages for federal employees and opportunities for employees to advance professionally and personally. Understanding the reasoning behind federal employee departure could assist organizational leaders in developing a better retention program for current and future employees. Increased retention might promote positive social change by increasing organizational revenue and stability in communities.

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Dedication

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

--Jeremiah 29:11

The steps of a good woman are ordered by the LORD: and she delighteth in her way. Though she fall, she shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth her with his hand.

--Psalms 37:24-24

My study is dedicated to my Lord and Savior. All the times that I wanted to change courses and thought that this was too much, He supplied me with His grace, love, strength, and power! Thank you for giving me the desires of my heart and showing me, leading me, and walking with me towards the plans that you have for me. You are and have forever been my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer. *“I love you, Lord, my strength”* (Psalm 18:1).

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I want to thank Walden University staff and faculty for making my doctoral study a success. Furthermore, I extend my deepest appreciation to my committee, Dr. Brian Cesario and Dr. Kelley Conrad. Their guidance, encouragement, and insight pushed me and motivated me throughout this program. Thank you for guiding me through the struggles of each chapter and for giving me the advice to push myself harder to achieve my dream. Also, I would like to thank the participants in my study; without you, this study could not have been completed. Lastly, I would like to thank all who have encouraged me over the years with your kind words of reassurance. Thank you.

Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

--Barack Obama, *Change We Can Believe In*

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Reducing turnover rates in the U.S. federal government has been a significant concern over the past several decades, which policy makers in the nation's capital have struggled to resolve (Kim & Fernandez, 2017). The continued rise in turnover rates among federal government employees has harmed government agencies (Losey, 2012). Some consequences include revenue lost from employees departing earlier than expected and organizations being left to determine ways to replace former employees' expertise while trying to hire new employees (Voigt & Hirst, 2015). Furthermore, federal agencies that lose employees must still fulfill the requirements of their mission statements and address overhead expenses (Voigt & Hirst, 2015). The federal government, like many organizations, faces recruitment and retention concerns. Understanding the reasoning behind federal government turnover of employees may help organizational leaders and policy makers to improve the retention of future employees.

Additionally, this study could provide approaches government leaders could use in their organization to limit the amount of turnover in their agencies (DeGeest, Follmer, & Lanivich, 2016). In Chapter 1, I will discuss the background, problem statement, purpose of this study, to include research questions developed to gain a better understanding of federal government turnover. Moreover, the theoretical framework will be discussed, assumptions, limitations, and the significance of this study.

Background

U.S. federal government agencies are spending a large portion of government funding (approximately \$11 billion annually) to compensate for voluntary turnover; these funds are used to hire and retrain personnel who have departed (Roche, Duffield, Homer, Buchan, & Dimitrelis, 2015). Additionally, turnover not only has a financial impact on the organization but is a morale concern for other employees. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has gathered information to further evaluate these issues by administering surveys to employees on different aspects of their organization.

OPM administered the U.S. Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey in 2010 to 139,000 federal employees. OPM staff evaluated the turnover rate among federal government employees by utilizing an internal government data assessment that captured demographics of federal government employees, which provided insight into the effects of the government's financial and economic crisis leading to federal turnover (Wynen & Beeck, 2014). They concluded that financial and economic crisis leads to federal turnover; the study revealed that salary is a considerable concern during times of financial and economic crisis (Wynen & Beeck, 2014). In previous research, Losey (2012) found turnover intention to vary among employees of different sexes, races, and ages; furthermore, promotions and work-life balance were found to be connected to turnover intention among employees. If these two aspects are aligned, the employee is less likely to depart the organization (OPM, 2015).

Jung (2011) measured the turnover intention of federal employees and predicted the governmental agency's actual reported turnover rates would vary. Jung discovered that employee turnover intentions are not evaluated to demonstrate the exact turnover rates. Due to this, data are not replicating the employee's actual intention to turnover versus evaluations completed by management. Finding that employee turnover intention is higher than documented turnover within the organization, Jung recommended that a more comprehensive tool be developed to annualize the data.

In subsequent research, Jung and Yoon (2014) confirmed that employees who are valued by the organization and have a higher level of job satisfaction are less likely to depart. On the other hand, the undervalued, demoralized, and those with low job satisfaction are more likely to leave the organization sooner without notice (Jung & Yoon, 2014). Identifying and understanding signs of employee turnover are crucial to the federal government's organizational management teams to maintain a strong working relationship with employees and to retain them for the future. Surveys of federal employees have highlighted employees' lack of job satisfaction, which commonly leads to turnover by the employee (OPM, 2015).

Furthermore, Leider, Harper, Shon, Sellers, and Castrucci (2016) discovered that federal health care providers' primary turnover concerns were pay and job satisfaction due to the low levels of both within the federal, state, and local government. Leider et al.'s study of federal health care providers captured the intent to leave; most current

employees planned to either retire, transfer, or resigned by 2020. Jung, Chan, and Hsieh (2017) revealed that these transitions cause existing employees to have lowered job satisfaction, conflicts, and issues concerning the government decision-making process, which in turn diminishes the organization's quality of life for employees and overall organizational performance. Jung et al. supported this finding by explaining the importance of psychological climate, which is perceived by employees as compelling experiences that impact their future actions in the organization.

My research could add to existing literature to offer a better understanding of the federal government turnover phenomenon. Using a qualitative single case study design, I gathered data gathered from former employees, which could give a better understanding of this increasing concern. Last, my study could support federal government organizations in identifying strategies that are needed to retain employees.

Problem Statement

Turnover rates in the U.S. federal government have continued to increase steadily since 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Federal government organizations have a pressing need to understand employee retention and predict employee intent to leave; organizations must therefore determine which techniques affect employee retention and employee satisfaction (Childs et al., 2017). Losey (2012) recognized that increased voluntary turnovers and retirements contributed to the significant deterioration in federal government employment since 1999, with substantial spiking accruing between 2010 and

2011. Likewise, retirement rates for federal employees are lingering at half of the average retirement threshold (Ertas, 2015). As the federal government continues to follow the trend, federal turnover rates have increased steadily over the past decade (Hur, 2013). Jung (2011) considered turnover as including separated federal government employees, transfers, resignations and retirements within the organization. Turnover rates have been increasing from 1999-2019; however, there has been insufficient documentation on the reason for amplified turnovers (Hur & Hawley, 2019).

Hussan (2013) asserted that voluntary turnover could contribute to organizational and managerial concerns due to incomplete or unclear performance requirements and organizational policy changes. These concerns include role ambiguity within the organization that negatively impacts federal employee turnover and retirement (Hussan, 2013). Turnover affects not only the organization but also the remaining employees' morale, especially if the organization is set up as an independent workgroup that relies on the team to accomplish a task (Ertas, 2015). According to the Government Performance Project Final Assessment (2003), a lack of governmental employees and expertise in the organization at the time when they are most needed could reduce organizational performance. Subsequently, Wynen and Kleizen (2019) stated that if separation upsurges continue, the United States may experience a financial and economic crisis.

Whitford and Lee (2015) have identified the turnover rate as a rising trend over several years among federal employees, which has affected all areas of the federal

government. Other researchers have noted its presence in all segments of the government workforce, including younger workers. Ertas (2015) gauged the turnover intentions among millennial federal government employees by using an internal government data assessment that captured the demographics of federal government employees. Millennial employees were more likely to depart organizations than older employees (Ertas, 2015). Work-life balance, job satisfaction, promotion, and pay were the primary reasons for millennials' turnover intention (Ertas, 2015). Understanding departure concerns for federal employees in different stages of their career; could provide agencies with the ability to mitigate potential turnover based off age.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore strategies that some U.S. federal government agencies could use to reduce turnover rates within their organization. Specifically, I focused on the perceptions of past federal employees who left their positions from 1999-2019. Interviews with former federal government employees will be beneficial in filling a gap in the professional literature on increased turnover rates amongst federal employees. The research could assist policy makers and agency leaders with developing a framework for future curricula and education on turnover rates within the federal government. Last, the results of this qualitative study could be used as a reference point for future quantitative studies.

Research Questions

I sought to answer three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What lived experiences do federal employees report contributed to their turnover?

RQ2: What other factors primarily influenced employees to depart from their federal positions?

RQ3: How did organizational challenges contribute to federal employees' voluntary turnover?

Theoretical Framework

I used Herzberg's two-factor theory as the theoretical framework to understand the significantly high level of turnover rates within the federal government. Herzberg developed the motivation-hygiene theory and correlated the motivations of employees in a working environment (Herzberg, Mausner, & Synderman, 1959). Herzberg's two-factor model has two components: attributes of satisfaction (motivators and satisfiers) and dissatisfaction (hygiene factors and dissatisfier; O'Neill, Hodgson, & Mazrouei, 2015). Dissatisfaction may be displayed as overzealous organizational policies, uncertain job security, and pay; satisfaction may be displayed as award recognition, position recognition, or promotions (O'Neill et al., 2015). Hygiene and satisfier characteristics might recognize significant relationship levels of job dissatisfaction and could lead to

future unnecessary turnovers within the federal government. According to Chapman (2010), Herzberg applied this theory at the University of Pittsburgh with Flanagan, who earlier had developed the critical incident method based on work completed with soldiers from the Second World War.

In studies that are based on two-factor theory, researchers assess hygiene and motivation factors to determine motivation, job satisfaction, and turnover (Zhang, Yao, & Cheong, 2011). According to Syed and Ozbilgin (2010), job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are separate entities and act independently of each other. Because this theory includes both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, the theory may clarify turnover attributes that contribute to federal government employees' departure from federal positions. I applied Herzberg's two-factor theory to examine which attributes of satisfaction (motivators and satisfiers) and dissatisfaction (hygiene factors and dissatisfier) may influence employees' decision to depart the organization. In Chapter 2, I will provide more explanation of the study's theoretical framework.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative approach and a single case study design for the investigation. The findings may be useful in providing feedback to the federal government on how to retain their employees in the future. I focused on the perceptions of past federal employees, who left their positions from 1999-2019, on turnover. Voluntary turnover and retirements among federal employees are on the rise (Childs et al., 2017). I conducted

this single case study to understand employees' reasoning for departing their organization and to document employee experiences. One-on-one interviews were conducted with previous federal employees who had departed their organization at one point in their career or were in retirement. Interview responses were analyzed to more fully understand the phenomenon of increasing turnover within the federal government.

Definitions

Extrinsic job satisfaction factors: External factors that affect the employee externally and lead to specific behaviors, such as rewards, time off, promotion, and bonuses (Bektaş, 2017).

Intent to leave: The desire to depart a federal government job within a year with the intent to work in a position outside the federal government (OPM, 2015).

Intrinsic job satisfaction factors: Motivator factors that affect the employee, such as being allowed to lead a project, having management involvement, being given more responsibility than that afforded in the current position, and receiving recognition for achievements (Bektaş, 2017).

Job satisfaction: The emotional satisfaction the employee has for the job based on personal assessment and current working conditions (Bektaş, 2017).

Psychological climate: Employees' interpretation of their employment atmosphere (Baltes, Zhdanova, & Parker, 2009).

Retention: An organization's ability to retain its employees (Kumar, 2013).

Assumptions

The first assumption for this study was that all participants would be former federal employees. The next assumption was that they would answer all interview questions honestly. Also, I assumed that recruiting participants via social media would increase the likelihood of participation; due to the high number of government agencies that allow federal employees to use social media for various reasons such as collaboration with outside organizations, hiring potential employees, and personal use (Gintova, 2019). I also assumed I would not anticipate any content or related cultural issues. Last, I assumed that 12 participants would provide an extensive amount of data to reach saturation for this study.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope and research parameters define the delimitations and characteristics of a study and are controlled by the researcher (Simon, 2011). The targeted population for this study was former federal employees located in various areas of the world. The sample population was General Schedule (GS) employees. I interviewed participants who met that criterion.

Limitations

In this study, I interviewed former federal employees from various agencies to gain a better understanding of the turnover rate in the federal government. The primary limitations of this study were the threats to validity; to remediate some of these threats, I asked participants to answer questions truthfully. I explored the lived experiences of previous federal employees, and while interview questions remained the same, the individual responses varied among participants. A second limitation concerned the interview questions for self-reporting (see Appendix B); I considered that participants might be hesitant to provide correct information, which could cause inaccuracy in the findings. To preempt these limitations, I ensured that all interviewees were comfortable and relaxed. I also reconfirmed with the interviewees that all questions should be answered in their own words. Last, triangulation was used to ensure the reliability and accuracy of information received.

Significance

This research will aid in narrowing the research gap and assist with providing data on the continuous departures and retirements among U.S. federal government employees over the last decade (Childs et al., 2017). Isolated influences can encourage turnover rates within governmental organizations, especially when unemployment rates are unsteady and accession rates are low (Wynen & Beeck, 2014). Unproportioned turnover rates

across the federal government have led to an amplified number of transfers, resignation, and retirements within organizations (Jung, 2011).

The outcome of this study may yield a better understanding of the recurring cycle of excessive turnover rates in the federal government (Holtom & Burch, 2016). This research could suggest a feasible way to retain federal employees in government positions. Also, the results of this study may identify direct and indirect reasons federal government employees choose to depart from their organization instead of staying.

The social change implications of this study include providing government agency leaders with a starting point in developing strategies that could increase employee retention within the federal government. By revealing the lived experiences of former employees, this study could provide agencies with knowledge to help resolve this continued issue. As turnover rates continue to surge, government agencies have a higher risk of experiencing decreased performance, growth, profits, and productivity (Meuris & Leana, 2015). Recognizing and reducing volunteer turnover could decrease the budget for hiring new employees, which could lead to profitable returns for organizations (Peltokorpi, Allen, & Froese, 2015). This study could provide information on the effects of government turnover and help organizations implement procedures to recruit and retain employees and better interact with other government agencies (DeGeest, Follmer, & Lanivich, 2016).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I provided a general overview of federal government turnover and its effects on governmental agencies over the last two decades. I also presented the RQs, which were designed to address key concerns related to increased turnover within federal agencies. In Chapter 2, I will provide more information on the theoretical foundation and concepts that underpinned this study. The literature review will provide a comprehensive assessment of existing literature and the effects of turnover in the federal government.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Understanding turnover rates is essential; since 2016, 3 million government employees have departed their positions, and in upcoming years, that trend could increase significantly (Childs et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017). Substantial research has been conducted on the topic of turnover rates (e.g., Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, and Maude., 2017; Derby-Davis, 2014); however, less research is available on turnover rates within the U.S. federal government. I conducted this study to address the limited data on turnover rates. The specific purpose of this study was to provide a clear understanding of the lived experiences of former federal employees and their reasons for departing the federal government. In Chapter 2, I will provide overviews of the literature search strategy and theoretical foundation, followed by the literature review with critical terms. I sourced publications that referenced the study topic with publication dates ranging from 1959 to 2019.

Literature Search Strategy

I performed several searches in academic databases to obtain peer-reviewed literature. These included databases within Walden University Library, comprised of ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, ProQuest Political Science, PsycINFO, Political Science Complete, and Business Source Complete, in addition to Google Scholar. Keyword search combinations included *employee turnover*, *employee motivation*, *job*

retention, turnover, job satisfaction, government jobs, job dissatisfaction, civil service, public service, federal government, labor retention, employee retention, employee satisfaction, job turnover, labor turnover, employee turnover, trends, compensation, consequences, federal, government, attrition, organizational performance, and Herzberg's two-factor theory.

The iterative search process entailed using these keywords and phrases in simultaneous database searches. I then applied filters on the computerized searches to condense the output results. Filters within the computerized searches included specific keywords, phrases, dates, and databases; I explored research literature containing relevant information, concepts, context, and data related to employee turnover in the federal government. My focus was on finding peer-reviewed literature. There was no concern with research availability.

Theoretical Foundation

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Needs (Two-Factor Theory)

Herzberg developed two-factor theory to understand the reasons for employee job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. While working in Pittsburgh, Herzberg et al. (1959) studied 200 accountants and engineers to determine and comprehend which factors influenced employees' motivation and job satisfaction. One of the primary goals of that study was to determine what motivates employees to be better performers for the organization. Herzberg's (1959, 1974) findings revealed that more than one factor affects

employee satisfaction; if one or more incentives or rewards encourages employee satisfaction, it is possible for undesirable attributes to influence employee dissatisfaction. The terms Herzberg used to describe those attributes, rewards, incentives, and or attributes are now known as *motivators* and *hygiene factors* (Damiji et al., 2015).

Herzberg's theories were applied in studies that were known worldwide. Herzberg's two-factor theory was used for the first time for an employee selection and training program for AT&T; this program applied Herzberg's theory to recruit college applicants in the AT&T program (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al. (1959) combined the two factors with job enrichment; his books were later reprinted over 200 times internationally and used throughout various fields and business environments (Herzberg, 1974; Herzberg et al., 1959).

Herzberg's research was multifaceted, as he interviewed white-collar employees and supervisors to gain a better understanding of what influenced their feelings of being either satisfied or dissatisfied within their current employment. Those results showed that employees felt satisfied as long as their work met the objective of their needs (Herzberg, 1974; Herzberg et al., 1959). When organizations provide employees with what they need, they are able to enhance employee performance, attitude, and work environment (O'Neill et al., 2015).

Herzberg's (1959, 1974) two-factor theory suggested that if employee job satisfaction is high, then turnover rates and intentions should decrease. Following this

trend, if employee job dissatisfaction has increased, then the turnover rate and intention will increase (Lumadi, 2014). Congruently, Herzberg discussed factors that support amplified motivation and satisfaction within organizations to deter and mitigate employee turnover (Derby-Davis, 2014; Ghazi, Shahzada, & Khan, 2013). Herzberg et al. (1959) discussed factors related to job satisfaction and the effects on the employee's current work environment. Herzberg's (1959, 1974) major hygiene factors were pay, overzealous organizational guidelines, work environment, and employee relationships. Also, motivational factors such as job recognition and promotion successes provide employees with a feeling of belonging to the organization (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

Motivators vary from employee to employee; however, recognition for work performance, promotions, and being presented with responsibility within the employees' organization provide satisfying results to the employee and the job they perform for the organization (Damiji et al., 2015). Organizations can motivate their employees by taking the time to understand the personal goals the employees would like to achieve within the company. Baumeister (2016) considered employee motivation the ability to influence employees to complete a task or object within the organization's goals or scope. Alshmemri et al. (2017) further commented that Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory expounded on motivational factors and hygiene factors, surges in job satisfaction, and reductions in job dissatisfaction.

Correspondingly, hygiene factors play a significant role in employee satisfaction but affect every employee differently. For instance, lacking hygienic factors such as job security, pay, employee status, and organizational policies can lead to dissatisfaction and be the result of extrinsic influences (Damiji et al., 2015). Employees could generally enjoy their work but be dissatisfied with the organization in which they work. Herzberg did not view satisfaction and dissatisfaction as being in opposition because employees determine if they are satisfied (Chen, Lu, Gupta, & Xiaolin, 2014). Understanding and managing the hygiene needs of employees could assist management with addressing employee dissatisfaction and poor performance as well as provide managers with leadership training that could also mitigate dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Making positive steps toward improving motivation can be vital for reducing employee turnover.

My rationale for choosing Herzberg's two-factor theory was because it facilitated the analysis of increased turnover rates within federal government agencies and motivation of former government employee's early departures (Derby-Davis, 2014; Ghazi, Shahzada, & Khan, 2013). Using Herzberg's methodology and applying the theory to this study may clarify the reasons for the increased turnover rates within the federal government. It could also provide federal agencies with recommendations on decreasing turnover in their organization.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Factors

Researchers have reviewed and tested Herzberg's two-factor theory to identify how various factors affect cultures, genders, and organizations. Sankar (2015) explored the influence of hygiene factors within the paper industry; the study focused on retaining employees and job satisfaction. The study showed an association between retaining employees, job satisfaction, and hygiene factors (Sankar, 2015). Sankar found that, when job satisfaction is elevated, hygiene factors are met; this finding demonstrated that retaining employees was obtainable.

Furthermore, Fareed and Jan (2016) evaluated how extrinsic and intrinsic factors affected bank employees; the results from the study showed that hygiene factors meaningfully affected job satisfaction. Conversely, Fareed and Jan (2016) stated Herzberg's motivators had no influence on employee's job satisfaction. Likewise, employees view and rate extrinsic and intrinsic factors on diverse scales based on personal experiences.

Herzberg's two-factor theory revealed influences like compensation, benefits, and pay will not always equal job satisfaction. Chinyio, Suresh, and Salisu (2018) harmonized with Herzberg's theory and further stated employee turnover rates were reduced when employees had job satisfaction. Identifying and reducing influences that are linked to turnover could improve employee productivity and performance (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Chinyio et al., 2018). Moreover, the absence of some hygiene factors, like compensation and pay, continues to have adverse effects on employee

satisfaction (Holmberg, Caro, & Sobis, 2017). Compensation and pay can significantly affect the employee's retention and work within the organization. Organizations concerned with employee promotion strategy and compensation have less turnover and retain motivated employees in their organizations (Mburu, 2017).

Herzberg et al. (1959) theorized compensation and pay were not reasons that weighted in on employee work satisfaction, but a dissatisfied attribute influenced employee's unfortunate job satisfaction. Moreover, organizations have determined dedicated teams are needed to ensure the compensation being provided to employees is correctly scaled to recruit and retain their employees and to compete against outside agencies if needed. Studies on employee retention and compensation revealed remuneration motivated employees and increased employee retention rates within organizations (Sarmad, Ajmal, Shamim, Saleh, & Malik, 2016). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation amongst bank employees were studied, and it was determined organizations that implement hygiene factors showed better work performance; however, balancing motivator factors should occur within the organization (Kalhor, Jhatial, & Khokhar, 2017).

Although theorists have supported Herzberg's two-factor theory, others have also disparaged his work. Lo, Lin, and Hsu (2016) concluded Herzberg's theory was flawed and lacked consistencies of the use in terms that ultimately nullified the rationality behind his research. Theorists have continued to conduct and have concluded numerous research

studies with aims to dismiss Herzberg's two-factor theory (Graen, 1968; Schwab & Heneman III, 1970; Whitsett & Winslow, 1967). Bockman (1971) revealed the theorists and scholars negated relevant data Herzberg argued, some of which were (Ewen, Smith, Hulin, & Locke, 1966; Friedlander, 1963; Wernimont, Toren, & Kopell, 1970), who removed data from Herzberg to seem relevant.

Intent to Leave and Federal Service

Kim and Park (2014) revealed those employees who work within private organizations earn significantly more than those who work in public or government companies; this often leads to employee dissatisfaction and increased motivation to depart governmental organizations. Organizations can review data from the various researchers on strategies that increase job satisfaction among employees and develop strategies within their agencies to improve this area. A study was conducted to assess job satisfaction, pay, gender, and the effects on federal employee's intent to leave (Ezeh & Olawale, 2017). The study determined neither job satisfaction nor pay had a significant impact; however, females in the study expressed a higher intent to depart their position than their male counterparts (Ezeh & Olawale, 2017). As with all private organizations, various attributes affected, including gender and employees' assessment of job satisfaction.

Millennials in the federal government are intrinsically driven and choose to work in organizations where they can affect social change or that provide them with a sense of

purpose; on the other hand, millennials' extrinsic needs are met when they find organizations with professional advancement opportunities (Henstra & McGowan, 2016). Ertas' (2015) study evaluated the generation gap between employees in the federal government; the study concluded millennials were more likely to notify their turnover intentions to their agencies compared to other generational employees. Organizational attributes or offers do not affect the millennial's decisions to depart. The effects of millennial turnover and not understanding the reason for their departure affects the organizational workflows and budgets. Various influences affect employee intent to leave federal government positions, such as age, loyalty, job satisfaction, gender, organization management teams, and salary. A study was conducted to assess job satisfaction, loyalty, and the effects on federal employees' intent to leave (Weaver, 2015). The study determined even though employees were pleased with their positions and were loyal to their agencies, they would not convey intent to depart; job satisfaction was a primary consideration for employees determining if they would depart an organization (Weaver, 2015). Understanding the reasons and factors behind employee departures can increase the organizational potential to retain their employees (Weaver, 2015).

Insbinett and Ballaro (2014) described employee retention as the organization's ability to retain current employees. Employees are the glue of the organizations, and retaining qualified employees is a must. Ensuring employee values and beliefs are aligned with the organizational environment is key to encouraging employee retention (Insbinett & Ballaro, 2014). Human resources (HR) continues to have issues with hiring

new employees due to the organization's current employee retention strength (Holtom & Burch, 2016). Sdrali, Goussia-Rizou, Giannouli, and Makris (2016) determined enhancing the person to organizational fit while applicants are being recruited could provide HR and management with future employees who could remain and establish tenure. Organizations would need to take additional steps to ensure the skill set and character of the future employee sync with job requirements and organizational social norms.

Additionally, a study assessed if employee departure intent could be predicted among federal employees in numerous agencies; it was determined various factors increased turnover rates and its prediction (Cohen et al., 2016). Adverse factors were salary concerns, work schedules, and promotion unavailability, all of which increased and harmed government turnover. On the other hand, when those attributes are achieved, and employee satisfaction increased, the turnover rate decreased for the organization (Cohen et al., 2016). If organizations focused on the agency-specific influences that increased intent to leave, such as management and organizational policies and red tape, this could help decrease employees' decisions to depart (Sdrali et al., 2016). Concentrating on specific employee intentions and reasoning for departure could become off-putting for management and HR as they work towards retaining current employees. An increase in employee intention to leave affects turnover and retention within an organization.

Summary and Conclusion

Whitford and Lee (2015) identified turnover rates had been a rising trend over 2012-2015 among federal employees. Increased turnover has been affecting all areas of the federal government. Cho and Lewis (2012) revealed between 2006-2008, one-fourth of federal employees hired departed within two years, and another two-thirds voluntarily departed in the next five years.

The Herzberg two-factor theory will be used as the theoretical framework to consider the reasons behind the significantly high level of turnover rates within the federal government. Using this theory will provide the framework to understand the perceptions of a separate set of factors known as the hygiene and motivation factors to determine motivation, job satisfaction, and turnover (Zhang et al., 2011). According to Syed and Ozbilgin (2010), job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are separate entities and act independently of each other. Because the two-factor theory looks at both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, it may provide concepts to examine the lived experiences of federal government employees and turnover attributes that contribute to their departure from federal positions and will extend knowledge in the discipline.

In summary, Chapter 2 provided an overview of current and significant data related to the study via the literature search strategy used. This chapter also reviewed the theoretical foundation that will be used in this study. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of research design, methodology, researcher's role, trustworthiness, and ethical

procedures. The chapter will also include the measurement tool to be used in this case study. Lastly, the chapter will cover the protocol that reviews the rights and the privacy of each participant.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an improved understanding and insight into turnover within federal government organizations in the United States. Using a qualitative approach, I conducted a single case study specifically focusing on the perceptions of former federal employees who were employed between 1999 and 2019. The population consisted of former federal employees who departed the federal government within this period. The goal was to examine how the lived experiences of former federal employees might explain the increased turnover within the federal government. In Chapter 3, I will provide an overview of research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. This chapter will include overviews of the measurement tools that were used in this case study and the protocols that were used to protect participants' rights and privacy.

Research Design and Rationale

I used the qualitative approach and a single case study design to explore the perceptions of 17 former federal employees who were employed between 1999 and 2019. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of turnover within federal government organizations. The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: What lived experiences do federal employees report contributed to their turnover?

RQ2: What other factors primarily influenced employees to depart from their federal positions?

RQ3: How did organizational challenges contribute to federal employees' voluntary turnover?

I used a single case study design to gain a better understanding of the interviewee's thought processes (see Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated that this approach is suitable because a case study is designed to gain better clarity of various simple or complex concerns. A case study is the best methodology for answering what and how questions (Tsang, 2014). I collected qualitative and reliable information from interviewees through an individual interview process (Kornbluh, 2015); this provided a clear understanding of the lived experiences each interviewee reported.

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect agencies inside and outside the government differently. However, federal government organizations must have a better understanding of employee turnover in their agencies due to the continued rise of employee departure transfers, resignation, and retirements (Jung, 2011). I conducted a qualitative study because this research method lends itself to the acquisition of rich, open-ended data,

which cannot be achieved using quantitative research methods (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2014).

Quantitative methodology is used to measure numerical data by searching for patterns, making assumptions, and simplifying these results over the population; quantitative methods were not appropriated for my study as I measuring data, searching for patterns, or predicting outcomes (Trafimow, 2014). Ethnographic researchers observe individuals in their familiar environments understand social patterns or behaviors (Baskerville & Myers, 2015). While narrative researchers gather experiences from participants' stories of past and current experiences and then writes a story to depict those life experiences (Martin, 2016). Lastly, grounded theory researchers use data that systematically captures the social process or the interaction of participants' experiences (Johnson, 2016). None of these research methods applied to this study; a single case study allowed the researcher to conduct interviews with participants to clarify the phenomenon (Kornbluh, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I instructed the interviewees on the informed consent process. This process is established to ensure that participants are not harmed and that their participation is voluntary (Judkins-Cohn, Kielwasser-Withrow, Owen, & Ward, 2014). Informed consent includes the disclosure and information to ensure that participants comprehend key study details. The researcher is charged with ensuring that the

participants are informed of all processes and procedures related to this study. Before participation began, I explained the topic, purpose, RQs, the significance of the study, and the plan for further analysis.

I ensured the interviewees understood their rights as participants and what my responsibilities were to protect their identities and confidentiality. By providing the participants with the informed consent process and explaining to them Walden's ethical procedures, a researcher may avoid any legal or ethical concerns during the study (see Judkins-Cohn et al., 2014). The interviewees had no association with my profession at the time of the study. Even though participants volunteered to engage in this study, ethical concerns (e.g., privacy and confidentiality) could have been a concern. I attempted to minimize these concerns by complying with the *Belmont Report's* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) recommended guidelines.

Additionally, my role as the researcher was that of an insider due to my work with federal employees over the past 20 years. To minimize researcher bias, Phillips (2016) recommended the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the bias in an epoch and allowing oneself to be open-minded and understanding of the viewpoints of the interviewees. Furthermore, Lawrence (2015) noted that human viewpoints and emotional attachments to the topic often contribute perplexing biases in the results of quantitative research. However, the same components can be useful and purposeful within qualitative research due to the new dynamics that can enrich the findings (Lawrence, 2015). I

accepted the outcome of this study, regardless of any personal bias. I reassured the participants that they could be as frank and candid as they chose during the interview process.

I used an interview protocol per the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process and the doctoral study guidelines. Using the interview protocol allowed me to remain uniform throughout the interview process and maintain a clear protocol (see Appendix A). I followed Castillo-Montoya's (2016) four-phase process to assist with the methodical format and definition of the interview protocol. Those phases are organizing interview questions to answer the RQs, assembling a critical-thinking discussion, gathering feedback on interview protocols, and leading the interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I secured the data on an encrypted computer, which will be encrypted for 5 years. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed to protect participant confidentiality.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The targeted population of this study was former federal employees located in various areas of the world. They consisted of GS employees; I interviewed only select former employees who were employed from 1999 to 2019 in a federal agency for this study. I recruited participants through social media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Because participants could be located worldwide, I distributed informed consent via e-

mail so that prospective participants could ask questions or discuss concerns before agreeing to participate in the study. Participants replied to the e-mail with the words, “I consent.” After gaining their consent, I used my Walden University e-mail account to schedule an interview date and time with the interviewees. Consent forms were provided via e-mail before the interview process began. I did not conduct interviews without the informed consent of the participants.

Robinson (2014) conducted a similar case study using a sample size of five participants; later, Shaheen (2016) led an employee retention study with five participants as well. Both researchers concluded that their sample size was satisfactory for their research. Furthermore, Combs (2017) completed a similar case study on employee turnover, including five participants. An additional multiple case study was comprised and finished within the field, and the sample size consists of two participants (Miller, 2017). The similarities between my study and those of Robinson, Combs, Miller, and Shaheen are that a sample size of five participants was selected to answer their comparable RQs, which were sufficient to achieve saturation. Therefore, for my qualitative study, a sample size of 17 participants was used to provide the proper data to reach saturation limits. Fusch and Ness (2015) concluded that saturation limits are reached after the study fails to generate new data or themes towards the research, or if coding is not feasible.

Instrumentation

Semi structured interview questions will be prewritten before the interview process for participants. Interviewing will commence with open-ended experience questions; then, based on the interviewee's responses, I will ask specific follow up questions with a clear focus on the lived experience of the former federal employee. Interview questions will include items regarding how the experience that contributed to their turnover and the primary influences that made the employee decide to depart from their governmental positions (see Appendix B).

The semi structured interview approach will be used for this study, and I will ensure participants feel comfortable during the process. I will monitor how the participant feels from their responses and feedback throughout the session and will record the interview to ensure all information is accurate, using a laptop to take notes during the session. Additionally, I will ensure all questions are asked and may ask any additional questions for clarification or further evaluation based on the interviewees' responses to the primary questions. No legal or historical documents will be used as sources in this study.

Data collection tool

My role in the study will be to serve as the primary data collection tool; I will recruit participants, and after informed consent is given, I will interview to collect the lived experiences of former federal employees through semi structured interviews. Yin

(2018) stated data collection within qualitative research comprises but is not limited to, interviews of participants within an organization and review of organizational policies and procedures affecting the study. In this qualitative study, I will need to use active listening, provide feedback, and ensure an environment that encourages openness and communication between interviewee and interviewer is created (Rossetto, 2014).

To retain uniformity throughout, I will implement an interview process and following a clear protocol (see Appendix A). Member checking will be implemented by reviewing the information provided by the participants after the interview. This ensures all information transcribed and noted during the interview, are recorded and appropriately documented. In addition, it confirms the information is the exact thoughts and viewpoints of the participants to alleviate bias and to safeguard content validity (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner 2015). If there are any concerns, I will work with the participant to resolve the issues during the debrief of the interview.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After recruitment through social media, participants were distributed informed consent forms via e-mail, and a return e-mail was received at my Walden University e-mail address with their consent. Data collection began based on the participant's availability and scheduling. If too few participants are recruited to meet the study sample requirement, I will participate in upcoming local events in the community to recruit the number needed for proper sampling.

Participants will be kept anonymous throughout the reporting of my study. I will develop a coding system to identify each participant during this study, as Participant 1-17. My Walden University e-mail address will be given to all participants so they can contact me with questions or concerns at any time during the debriefing and exiting of the study. Also, I will have each participant's information if follow up interviews are needed.

Data Analysis Plan

Yin (2017) stated there are five critical components of data analysis. Those five components are compile, disassemble, reassemble, clarify, and conclude, in this study, I will follow Yin's guidance. Also, I will achieve member checking and triangulation using multiple approaches such as; audio, visual, and written to analyzing data study (Yin, 2014). Member checking refers to a researcher interviewing the participant, then providing feedback on what they interpreted the participant to have said, and the participant validating that information for accuracy (Davidson et al., 2013). I will utilize triangulation to analyze data from various viewpoints to obtain a better understanding of the study. According to Kemner, Stachecki, Bildner, and Brennan (2015), when a researcher observes the body language and verbal cues of the interviewee, this provides additional data (Wadham & Warren, 2014).

I will use NVivo 12 software, which was designed to code data rapidly, efficiently, and provide a visual display; for this study NVivo, 12 will be used to organize, develop themes, gather data, and analyze methods (Davidson et al., 2013).

Utilizing NVivo 12 software will assist me in establishing themes to describe the interviewees' lived experiences; after the researcher has uploaded the data into the software, the coding can begin (Smit, 2012). I will develop categories and identify keywords, then place the data into specific themes. The software has an application that can recognize themes and patterns; during the reassembling process, the researcher will reorganize the data until the appropriate answers are provided for the RQs (Yin, 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility within qualitative research relates to the triangulation, multivocality, and partiality while interacting with participants during a study. Thick description is a term used to describe contextual data applied to people, processes, and activities. Triangulation describes the combination of multiple data sources to obtain credibility. According to Bland and Tobbell (2015), various data recommendations such as observation, video recording, interviewing can contribute to exploring the study through triangulation. My ability to use different data collection methods will allow triangulation from several sources and provide confirmation (Cao, Chen, & Song, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Transferability within qualitative research relates to individuals interpreting information and associating data to their circumstances or situation. According to Tracy (2013), qualitative researchers establish resonance within their transcript, to make readers feel they are experiencing the circumstance or situation. The research data will be used appropriately for others to understand.

The dependability and confirmability within qualitative research, are annotated through the use of documentation; Kornbluh (2015) stated the researcher's interview notes, coding analysis, recorded interview, and field notes; all support the dependability and confirmability of the research. Also, establishing a chart and theme for the coding analysis on my personal computer, with other saved work from this study, will further aid in dependability and confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Before data collection begins, I will submit appropriate documentation to Walden University for IRB approval. After IRB approval, the data collection process will begin. I will send participants informed consent agreements, which will include the disclosure, capacity, comprehension, and permission request; I am charged with ensuring the participant are informed of all processes and procedures relevant to this study. I will use the Belmont Report Protocol as an ethical guideline of how to research with human participants (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). Furthermore, the Belmont Report Protocol clarifies the ethical guidelines to demonstrate respect for participants, justice, and beneficence (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I will ensure non-maleficence for the participants by ensuring risk is minimized and a safe and harm-free environment is established during the interview process. Hammersley (2015) stated beneficence refers to safeguarding, ensuring the

confidentiality and wellbeing of participants engaging in research studies. I will protect participants by removing their names and identifiers before publishing the study results.

Furthermore, the consent form has detailed information disclosing the right of the participant to withdraw or decline from the study at any time and that their participation will be strictly anonymous. Compensation or incentives will not be given to participants for participating in this study, and participants will not be penalized for declining to participate. I will store, secure, and destroy data after the set time specified by Walden IRB. All submissions and summary reports will remain confidential and stored in the same location.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of research design, methodology, researchers' role, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. This chapter also covered the measurement tools used in this case study. Lastly, the chapter covered the protocol that reviews the rights and the privacy of each participant. Chapter 4 will demonstrate the statistical data from the research finding of the lived experiences of former federal employees using a qualitative approach and single case study methodology.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to gain improved understanding and insight into turnover within federal government organizations. I specifically focused on the perceptions of past federal employees who were employed at some point from 1999 to 2019. The data were obtained from 17 former federal employees who departed various federal government agencies between 1999 and 2019. The interview questions that I used to answer the study's three RQs are located in Appendix B. The goals were to learn what factors lead to turnovers and increase understanding of the phenomenon within the federal government. In Chapter 4, I will provide an overview of the research setting, demographics, information on the data collection and analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, and results, including the themes that emerged from data analysis.

Setting

Participants that were selected to participate in this study were all former federal employees at the time of the study. According to World Health Organization (2020), COVID-19 was declared a pandemic March 2020 in the United States and could have influenced the study results. However, other influences, such as budget cuts or changes in personnel within an organization, were not concerns. All participants were employed with agencies outside the federal government during their participation in this study.

Demographics

The targeted population for this study was former federal employees located in various areas of the United States. They consisted of GS employees; I interviewed select former employees who were employed from 1999 to 2019 in a federal agency. Five of the 17 participants served overseas in a federal agency, and the others resided in the United States.

Data Collection

Each participant responded to five interview questions that were designed to elicit information on their lived experiences related to their former federal employment. The data collection was telephonic; the frequency of the data collection was once per participant, and the duration was approximately 45 minutes for each participant. I recorded the interviews to ensure all information was accurate and also used a laptop to take notes during the session. To alleviate bias and to safeguard content validity, I implemented member checking after the interviews with the interviewees to ensure that all information was recorded and documented correctly and representative of the exact thoughts and viewpoints of the participants (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner 2015). There were no variations from the data collection plan listed in Chapter 3, and there were no unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection process.

Data Analysis

I used NVivo 12 software, which was designed to code data rapidly and efficiently and provide a visual display. Humble (2015) recommended utilizing the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) program to assist with qualitative research. I opted to use NVivo 12 software to assist in establishing themes to describe the interviewees' lived perceptions; after I uploaded the data into the software, I began the coding process. I developed categories and identified keywords, then categorized the data into specific themes. The software has an application that can recognize themes and patterns; during the reassembling process, I reorganized the data until an appropriate answer was provided for the RQs.

Upon completion of the interviews with the 17 participants, I determined that saturation for this study had been reached as no new emerging themes were discovered. NVivo 12 was used to organize and analyze the data and develop the themes. I followed Yin's (2017) five-step process for data analysis, which involved compiling, disassembling, reassembling, clarifying, and drawing conclusions from the data. Based on the guidance, I examined the data for broad themes that developed from the data. While compiling and analyzing the data, several themes were identified as commonalities among the participants. Themes that developed after coding and triangulation through the data analysis process were as follows: (a) job dissatisfaction, (b) compensation

(compared to private industries), (c) promotion and growth, and (d) leadership (negative and toxic environments for employees).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I used member checking to establish credibility for this study; participant's data were reviewed with them to ensure accuracy and correctness of what I interpreted from their responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Member checking allowed participants to validate the information that I transcribed and ensured that their experiences were documented (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The participants were asked to review the information received during the interview to ensure all data reflected their thoughts and input to this study. All participants validated that the information was correct.

Transferability and Dependability

Transferability and dependability could be limited due to the low number of participants in this study. I used perspective triangulation to mitigate this concern. The interviews were conducted with the 17 participants at various times to obtain comparable perceptions without contradictory interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 2017). Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that researchers use this method of triangulation to gather various viewpoints on a specific phenomenon.

The study involved participants who lived overseas and worked at different government agencies. This contributed participant variation, as each of the participants had different viewpoints and experiences regarding federal government employment. One of the 17 interviewees was female, five of the 17 interviewees were African American, one was Hispanic, and the other participants were White. This provided the ability to gain variation from perspectival triangulation in this study. Triangulation is described as the ability to collect quantifiable data through various methods, procedures, and sources; triangulation enables a clearer understanding of the phenomenon by allowing the researcher to utilize numerous data sources including interviews and other documentation (Ebrahimi et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Roberta & Dorothy, 2013).

Confirmability

Elo et al. (2014) described confirmability as the ability to determine the accuracy of data by using more than two participants and ensuring that the researcher follows the guidelines of the qualitative study. To establish confirmability, the researcher relies on reflexivity, which refers to the researcher's personal assessment of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, and Caricativo (2017) revealed that reflexivity within qualitative research refers to the researcher's understanding that the study could change their viewpoint based on the research findings. Applying this method allowed me to have an awareness of possible impact on the study and interpretations of the conclusion (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the study, I used reflexive journaling,

which I compare to reflective journaling. Reflective journaling is when I transcribed my thoughts and feelings throughout the process. Then I monitored if any of my preconceived philosophies may have affected the study results.

My perspective from the involved researcher through my reflective journaling of this study was amazement. I did not have a clear understanding of what my results would reveal, and as I conducted interviews with participants, I begin to feel and see most of them were dissatisfied with their previous position in one way or the other. My personal view was that having a federal job was a good stable place to work as we move to the results of my study; you can see how my thoughts begin to change.

Results

I sought to answer the following RQs, which pertain to employee turnover in the federal government:

RQ1: What lived experiences do federal employees report contributed to their turnover?

RQ2: What other factors primarily influenced employees to depart from their federal positions?

RQ3: How did organizational challenges contribute to federal employees' voluntary turnover?

I conducted 17 semi structured interviews; after coding and triangulation were completed, four themes presented themselves from the participants' responses.

Job Dissatisfaction

Upon interviewing P1-P17, job dissatisfaction was identified as a theme all participants had in common. Job satisfaction is prevalent in retaining employees, maintaining their commitment to the organization, and avoiding turnover (Herzberg, 1974). P1-P17 validated their reason for departing federal services were due to various forms of job dissatisfaction, such as inadequate compensation as compared to the private sector, lack of promotion opportunities, and continued self-growth and inconsistent leadership within their organizations. Herzberg et al. (1959) noted that leaders that have certain leadership qualities could motivate employees to achieve their goals for job satisfaction. Also, Cohen et al., (2016) believed that increasing job satisfaction can lead to lower turnover rates within organizations. Herzberg's (1959, 1974) motivation-hygiene theory or Herzberg's two-factor theory acknowledges and correlates the relation of employee turnover and job satisfaction. P15 shared, "It's easier to just leave than to stay where I was and be like unhappy." P15 recalled their unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the government agency and ultimately departed.

Compensation

Holtom and Burch (2016) state that employee compensation is relative to salary wages and incentives (cash bonus), which were compensated to employees for their

services within an organization; this was a critical attribute that influenced job satisfaction among former federal employees. Herzberg (1959, 1974) stated the employer and employee should review compensation as a hygiene factor; he noted this as job enrichment. Herzberg believed that all positions should be reviewed to determine ways to improve and provide the employee completing the task with greater satisfaction.

Furthermore, (Call, Nyberg, Ployhart, & Weekley, 2015) noted that compensation is an essential reason for employee turnover and should be one of the organization's primary concerns to reduce turnover within their organization. P1 revealed his thoughts on compensation:

I think that the pay wasn't enough; I know I would have been getting paid more.

P2 stated a new job opportunity provided better compensation to take a new position outside the federal government. It did offer me more money.

P4 offered the following thoughts on his federal government position: "I had taken about a thirty thousand dollar pay cut to become a GS employee, which would, you know was hard, on the family financially."

Herzberg (1959, 1974) stated compensation is a motivation attribute and linked to the hygiene factor, which influences job dissatisfaction. Federal government employees received incentives such as cash bonuses when they scored a high score on performance evals. Organizational leaders' influences can cause bonuses to be revoked and make unachievable. P17 shared an example of his experiences:

My score was often lowered because they can only give bonuses out to certain a certain number of people. And if you had a high enough score, then you had to get a bonus. When I was there, that was frustrating to me because they lowered my score even though I received a high score initially from my manager. Their leadership said, no, you need to lower his score because we can't give him a bonus.

P5, P7, P11, P13 agreed after their departure from federal service; their pay increased between 25K and 70K. Private sector compensation for the same work was consistent with P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P9-P14, P17; they revealed that compensation and benefits were the primary reason for their departure from federal service. Participants' comments on compensation related to the theoretical framework. P12 shared the following:

You know, I just think, the government overall benefits package and pay and what they're able to do for compensation just doesn't come close to what the private sector is able to provide. And the cost of living. It just makes it very tough.

P10 revealed,

I think for a lot of people it doesn't feel a lot different when you can leave, the organization as a civilian then come back the following day as the contractor doing much of the same work, but very little different. Your pay has effectively gone up by 50 to 100 percent.

The compensation theme relates to Herzberg's two-factor theory on job satisfaction; he also believes motivation factors are essential to job performance, but not limited to promotions and recognition for excellent performance within a position. These factors increase employees' job satisfaction and performance; leaders' direction and guidance can assist the organization with attaining strategies that could reduce employee turnover intent (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Promotion and Growth

Peltokorpi et al. (2015) research concluded that supervisors who are abusive towards employees or display negative behaviors have a significant effect on employees and the influence on employee incomes, specifically promotions. As the first level of management within an employee's job position, they have a responsibility to ensure employees' performance ratings have been conducted, training is obtainable, and goals are being set correctly and provide critical input on promotion advances for employees (Allen, Peltokorpi, & Rubenstein, 2016). Coping with negative management relationships could lead to a decreased promotion of advancement opportunities (Allen et al., 2016). P4, P5, P7, P12 -P15, P17 stated lack of promotion opportunities lead to their departure from federal service. Job satisfaction and promotion were included in Herzberg's two-factor theory and noted as factors for satisfaction. P9 shared that

Your promotable status may change because you might find yourself in a organization with people have no idea who you are. Promotion criteria depends

on changes. A structural change, that's one thing; but changing the promotion criteria, that's something that occurred also in conjunction. So I just always felt like you never had a solid target to aim for promotion and the ground shifted beneath you constantly.

Cappelli and Conyon (2017) studied the efficiency and reliability of performance evaluations and believed these should be standard and consistent as related to employee promotions. Also, Cappelli and Conyon (2017) noted a potential bias of performance evaluation system scores; it was believed that the rating could be adjusted to a higher or lower rating based on management interpersonal relationships with employees. Higher scores would be more favorable for promotion and growth, while lower scores would deem the opposite. P14 stated:

It seems to me like as a civilian it was more about a popularity thing and if a manager, if management liked you, liked being around you, liked you as a person as opposed to, you know, your actual job performance, and I know you had to do your ACE and write down all your stuff, but a lot of times it was more like, OK, we like John Smith, so therefore he should get promoted but this other guy. Steve was a better worker. Kind of like some favoritism going on.

Performance reviews in the federal government seemed to be ineffective and unfair, as commented by P4, P5, P12 -P15, P17. Voluntary turnover within these organizations concludes that not only is hiring important, but employee promotions and growth are as

well to maintain job satisfaction after hired (Koistinen & Jarvinen, 2016; Zopiatis, Constanti, & Theocharous, 2014). P5 thought,

The opportunity or the prospect of having individual growth in my mind would be a major factor in my growth limited by the organization now supporting me.

Koistinen and Järvinen (2016) proposed management working with HR could develop organizational practices and guidelines that could assist with promotion and growth practices and could lead to reducing employee turnover. Incentives such as promotions and the ability for employees to receive additional training within their career field could encourage them to stay in the organization (Williams & Adams, 2015).

Leadership Challenges

Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursière, and Raymond (2016) revealed limited studies included turnover and the effects of leadership, employee satisfaction, and employee commitment to the organization. Eight out of ten employees view their relationship and interaction with their supervisor as positive. (Mathieu et al., 2016). The two out of ten relationships and interactions that were negatively received, altered the employee's mood several times more than the positive experiences. P1-P10 and P12-P17 experienced some form of negative leadership interactions that affected them or their teams. P2 stated:

A lot of the problems and issues that we saw at my the organization that I worked for, there were a lot of the issues involved management, inability to get along with

each other, which caused a lot of issues for the general population that did the work, because a task that should be easy typically was not easy because you cannot depend upon all the people to accomplish the task.

Mapelu and Jumah (2013) found when negative leadership hinders the ability for employees to develop and affects employee turnover; however, if leadership provides a positive environment for employees to develop, that could lead to less turnover as employees' development and interaction with management affects employee turnover. Peltokorpi et al., (2015) identified undesirable leadership behaviors lead to turnover that could cost the organization billions of dollars. Coping avoidance mechanisms are often used by employees with abusive, toxic, and unreasonable leaders or managers to sustain a work environment until better opportunities present themselves (Peltokorpi et al., 2015). P3 stated

I can tell you that I work for some super people and I work for some people that were bullies. I worked for toxic of leaders, and one thing about me and I don't know if it helped me. Apparently, it didn't hurt me, I was always straight with my bosses, my supervisors. I always told them straight up how I felt, and I had a toxic leader. I told that leader they were toxic and I told them what was going to happen if they continued to be toxic, not just for me, but for the organization, throwing things at a person in a board meeting.

Toxic leadership, as stated by P3, can be addressed to the leader directly to resolve the issue or continue to let the issue continue to deteriorate, as P17 commented below.

P17 revealed

I had a leader that was pretty difficult to work with, who was not pleasant to be around. There are people that are put in place of like in leadership roles for the wrong reasons and it often causes I'll say drama within the team. She was not one of those examples, but just over time became difficult and toxic to work with.

Herzberg's two-factor theory could be applied to the federal government as a way to affect job satisfaction by considering the employee's hygiene needs from their leaders (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Also, Marshall et al. (2016) stated leaders could play an effective role early on; by motivating teamwork, provide recognition, and clear barriers that affect performance, then employees are more likely to remain with the organization. When leaders demonstrate support and growth of employees, this provides employees with the self-confidence to complete tasks and missions assigned to them and provides them with a sense of drive to keep performing at their best level (Marshall et al., 2016).

P6 said,

I think you will get more, more out of an individual if the mission was realized, you could actually work the mission. You would have no whatever, no whatever would come up in your mind to say, well, I can leave this, but if you do something that you see some return on your investment, I think you would stay I would have

stayed a lot longer to be a part of something that's really, really making a difference.

Summary

In summary, Chapter 4 provided an overview of the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results of the study. The themes discovered answered the three RQs; I sought to understand the experiences of federal government employees, departure, federal government organizational experiences, and organizational challenges. The data received from interviewees clearly explained their experiences and reasons for departing federal service. In closing, the four themes were job dissatisfaction, compensation and benefits, promotion and growth ability, and organizational leadership influences. Chapter 5 will demonstrate the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications from the data collected from the interviewees.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

I conducted this qualitative phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of former U.S. federal employees who departed government service from 1999 to 2019. An exploratory method was used to gain clarity and understanding of the participants' perceptions, lived experiences, and reasons for departing the federal government. Using a semi structured interview approach, I asked five interview questions and followed an interview protocol with each of the 17 participants (see Yeong et al., 2018).

The qualitative interviews were useful in gaining an understanding of why participants departed federal service. By using the qualitative phenomenological approach, I was able to explore and understand the meanings and various dynamics of the study phenomenon (see Creswell, 2009). Lavert (2003) explained that phenomenology is a valuable method for understanding the lived experiences of participants in a study. In using this approach, I gathered vital experiences from each interviewee that I then explored and interpreted. In Chapter 5, I will interpret the study findings in relation to the RQs and consider how the research provides additional knowledge to current literature. This chapter will also include the limitations of this study, recommendations for further research, and discussion of the study's potential impact on social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: Job Dissatisfaction

Analysis of the data revealed that job dissatisfaction was a prevalent theme amongst all study participants. Job dissatisfaction is the leading attribute in Herzberg's two-factor theory. As discussed in Chapter 2's literature review, Herzberg et al. (1959) noted that employees could encounter job dissatisfaction even if their other hygiene (e.g., pay, work environment, and employee relationships) requirements are achieved. The theme is consistent with the findings of various studies found during the literature review. Madupalli and Poddar (2014) revealed that most employees depart their employment based on overall job dissatisfaction. Also, Hofaidhllaoui and Chhinzer (2014) discovered the satisfaction level of employees was directly connected to turnover intention and opposing views of an organization. After reviewing the connections with employment, job satisfaction, and normative commitments, Gyensare, Otoo, Asare, and Twumasi (2015) revealed normative commitments in relation to departing were detrimental, and often dissatisfied employees felt less committed to their employer which opened a pathway for them to depart. Similarly, Islam and Ali (2013) concluded that dissatisfaction stemmed from organization guidelines, compensation, promotion, and growth potential. Employee dissatisfaction variously affected the organization; employee performance changed, profitability and productivity continued to decrease (Helm, 2013;

Islam & Ali, 2013). These dissatisfactions could have a significant effect on an organization.

Overqualification of an employee's skills is perceived as a factor contributing to job dissatisfaction; overqualification applies to employees who have more experience, education, or specific certifications for the position they currently occupy (Arvan, Pindek, Andel, & Spector, 2019). Herzberg's two-factor theory does not comment on an employee's qualifications. Coning, Rothmann, and Stander (2019) revealed that there is a correlation between job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and satisfaction with compensation; they concluded that employed individuals are more satisfied in their personal life than unemployed ones and that employees who experience positive employee satisfaction have an enhanced satisfaction with their life. Employees who are satisfied with their job display positive attributes such as job performance improvement, a healthier working relationship, and increased commitments to the organization (Arvan et al., 2019). Understanding this, Herzberg's two-factor theory could be beneficial to organizations to assist with employee retention (Shaikh, Shaikh, & Shaikh., 2019).

Theme 2: Compensation

The next theme found that compensation was a significant amongst study participants. Alshmemri, Shahn-Akl, and Maude (2017) stated that in order for organizations to hire the best and brightest, they must offer a competitive compensation package to employees. Compensation packages and benefits are correlated to employees'

decisions to depart the organization (Sarkar, 2018). Turnover rates are common in low-paying jobs that are customer service based due to job requirements and hours (Zhang, Li, Frenkel, & Zhang, 2019). Also, Stater and Stater (2019) stated that when compensation and benefits cannot be resolved with the employee and employer, the employee eventually departs the agency. Ozturkcu et al. (2018) revealed that an organization that develops reward systems for employees could enhance job satisfaction. When agencies provide awards to employees, it creates a healthy balance between employees and organization's goals, which leads to the organization recruiting, compensating, and retaining employees with the talent they are looking for.

Compensation is noted in Herzberg's two-factor theory. As revealed in the literature review, Herzberg et al.'s (1959) major hygiene factors were pay, overzealous organizational guidelines, work environment, and employee relationships. Herzberg et al. also found that compensation, rewards, and benefits were also significant to hygiene. When compensation, rewards, and benefits are perceived by employees to be unobtainable, employees become unmotivated; employees perceive these benefits as financial rewards for jobs well done, which enhances job satisfaction (Kollmann, Stöckmann, Kensbock, & Peschl, 2020; Stater & Stater, 2019). This theme was further supported by participants' responses during the interview and supported Herzberg's two-factor theory.

The theme connects various studies found during the literature review and enriches the research related to this field. Kollmann et al.'s (2020) study revealed that satisfaction needs varied amongst millennials and mature employees; after exploring compensation bonuses and mission success, Kollmann et al. determined that millennials would rather receive compensation bonuses, but mature employees were satisfied with contributing to mission and organization success. Managers should work with HR and determine the best financial incentives for their organization in order to retain their employees. Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski (2019) discovered that managers must develop financial and nonfinancial incentives to show employees that they are a value to the organization. When leaders acknowledge superior performance by employees, it gives the employee the motivation to perform more proficiently and effectively.

Hussain, Khaliq, Nisar, Kamboh, and Ali (2019) reviewed the combination of rewards, employee acknowledgments, stress within the work, and environment and the effects on job performance. They determined that rewarding and acknowledging employees on achievements had a significant effect on employees' continued output in the organization. Madhani (2020) noted that companies within the United States allocate upwards to \$80 billion a year as cash incentives to employees. Nguyen (2020) concluded a study that reviewed the impact of compensation, promotions, training opportunities, and rewards as compared to job satisfaction; the researcher found positive outcomes when employees benefited from those opportunities.

Study participants confirmed organizations that provide better compensations and benefits package did attract and retain employees, resulting in recognizable job performance improvements. Additionally, it was concluded employee turnover intentions correlated to their self-worth and involvement within the organization. Leaders and HR must develop, acknowledge, and reward employees who have exceeded the standard; this needs to be done in a way supporting a positive working environment.

Theme 3: Promotions and Growth

Continuing with the analysis of the data, promotion and growth was a pattern mentioned by study participants. When employees feel overwhelmed and stressed to accomplish a task or mission for an organization, leadership should address these issues to ensure employees concerns are reviewed and resolved. When requirements for promotions become challenging for an employee to achieve; this could significantly affect an employee's dedication and could cause burnout and influence their intentions to depart. Promotion and growth opportunities show employees the organization valued their performance abilities and commitment to the organization; employees who are provided those opportunities continue to be committed to the organization (Gkorezis & Petridou, 2012; Tews, Stafford, & Michel, 2014). When promotions seem unobtainable or requirements continue to changes to obtain them, employees may begin displaying low motivation and initiative (Gkorezis & Petridou, 2012).

Tews et al. (2014) revealed when leadership provide promotions to employees, it shows employees the leaders appreciate and care about their well-being. When these opportunities are provided to employees, this decreases their decision to depart due to the opportunity for advancement. Gkorezis and Petridou (2012) stated when advancement opportunities and growth are presented to employees, their self-esteem and self-worth are increased. Self-esteem falls under Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which describes self-gratification as needed to grow. Tews, Michel, and Ellingson (2013) continued to state advancement opportunities have a remarkable impact on the behavior and performance of employees. When leaders encourage employee growth, this decreases employees' decisions to depart. Employees who actively seek training and promotion opportunities for self-development and grow, normally continue to have organizational success (Walsh & Cain, 2017). Organizations that establish training and development opportunities are likely to have an advantage over organizations that do not (Bibi, Ahmad, & Majid, 2018). In addition, Bibi, Ahmad, and Majid (2018) noted a positive correlation between retention and management after developing successful training programs. Employers often neglect training, but when offered as rewards or promotion benefits, employees are often less likely to leave. Continually, employees who are skilled or certified in particular skill can improve their organization; additionally, employees that aspire and plan for successful careers can influence their advancement with a company (Franics, 2017; Khattak et al. 2014).

Long, Kowang, and Chin (2017) conducted a study on the impact of training, career progression, salary, and performance; the authors concluded these attributes left unsatisfied could lead to employee departing, and self-growth was viewed to employees as a factor of job satisfaction. Training opportunities are needed and having employees with specific skill sets gives the organization a competitive advantage (Long et al., 2017). Also, Ninan, Roy, and Thomas (2019) revealed the organizations should capitalize on their employees and provide them with training opportunities to make them more proficient in their skill set. When this is actioned, this provided employees with the keys they need to for promotion, self-development, and growth; when those opportunities are observed as obtainable, then turnover may decrease in that organization (Long et al., 2017).

Theme 4: Organizational Leadership Challenges

The final theme discovered was organizational challenges; this was described within participants interview sessions. Leadership is an important factor in Herzberg's two-factor theory. Herzberg et al. (1959) mentioned that motivational factors are linked to the individual's job, which can include but is not limited to rewards, salaries, promotions or growth. Herzberg et al. stated that the experiences employees have at their job determine their job satisfaction; most employees feel satisfied when they achieve specific goals, accomplish missions, or earn a promotion. However, job dissatisfaction can be caused by salaries, environment, organizational guidelines, policies, and employee

relationships (Kainkan, 2015). This theme was further supported by participants' responses during the interview and supported Herzberg's two-factor theory. The theme linked various studies found during the literature review and enriches the research related to this field.

Hur and Hawley's (2019) study associated with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory; they discovered leaders could develop an atmosphere for employees to succeed and be successful. Hur and Hawley's (2019) study agreed that the strategies to decrease turnover are ensuring employees have a supportive management team and identified that management plays a critical role in continued organization achievement.

Alfayad and Arif's (2017) study looked at the influence of a supportive management team and how those attributes could improve job satisfaction; they found positive results when the management team showed support and concern for employees, thus gaining a significant increase in output. This supported Herzberg's theory that employees need to be involved and have input to reduce job dissatisfaction. By developing and promoting an environment for advancement and growth, leaders are encouraging, displaying, and motivating their employees to communicate in a healthy work environment (Pagdonsolan, Balan, Mariscal, & Chui, 2020).

Herzberg et al. (1959) revealed employees are motivated by promotions, rewards, acknowledgments, training opportunities, and the job itself. These attributes were more rewarding than the working environment, organizational guidelines, or employee

relationships (Herzberg et al., 1959). Additionally, Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, employees appreciated when management showed a genuine concern for their work and respected them in their work environment. Additionally, employee satisfaction increased significantly when they were asked for ideas, strategies, and recommendations on leadership changes occurring in the organization. Correspondingly, those positive interactions led to positive relationships with management and accepting increased scope of work when needed. When organizations understand employees' motivators, they can effectively affect employee satisfaction, which could assist with developing a retention strategy (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations; the first limitation was this study collected data directly from former employees and did not utilize federal employers data such as exit interviews (Rubel & Kee, 2015). Another constraint was the data might have been limited in dependability and transferability. To counter this, I used participant variations by gathering research from various perspectives on the phenomenon, which is known as perspectival triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The participants in this study were different ages, ethnicities, from different cultures, and one participant was a female. In addition, some of the participants worked in various locations within the federal service. However, some of the participants worked within the same regions or locations as others and revealed similar experiences. Because the participants shared experiences that were

similar, this could have limited the phenomena. An additional limitation to consider was how participants were selected for this study; I used social media to assist with recruiting former federal employees for this study, which provided me with a variety of participants. However, results could have varied if I had targeted a specific group within a specific organization to participate.

Recommendations

The study's emergent themes, review of previous research data presented in the theoretical framework, and literature review provide federal organizations information to improve their organizational policies and practices in order to recruit and retain employees. When employees depart, they take critical knowledge and continuity with them that companies can not replace quickly or easily. The themes identified in this study may be useful to organizational leaders who are attempting to decrease turnover within their agency.

Retention of these employees is vital, implementing a program with leaders and HR to improve job satisfaction, review compensations, assess promotions, growth opportunities, and develop a leadership program for managers could support the organization's retention goals. Providing programs to improve professional employee growth through cross-training opportunities, leadership mentoring, and peer to peer mentoring could improve overall business operations and employee satisfaction.

The results could provide employees with the ability to advance their career by participating in organizationally driven programs to provide opportunities for them to participate. Employees could also use new data to provide strategies to assist changes in their leadership and working environment. Participants in this study wanted to cross-train within the organization to learn different skill sets and for personal growth; employees could use this research to support their request to cross-training within their organization or for other self-development opportunities.

Additionally, this study could be used as a baseline to review and update leadership courses organizations use to develop and prepare their leaders for superior positions. The findings could also be used in educational settings to enhance the curriculum on strategies to reduce turnover in the federal government and define better ways to recruit future employees. Aspiring leaders may utilize these results to develop and provide approaches that could assist with refining leadership behaviors, as related to retaining employees and determining ways to lower their intentions to depart.

Implications

The critical implication of this study could assist federal organizations in implementing positive social change and developing a better retention program for current and future employees. Bloom, McKenna, and Prettnner (2018) discovered our workforce would need 700 million jobs in the next decade to accommodate the growing U.S. labor force. In addition, implementing social change could intensify employee

satisfaction and lead to higher productivity within the organization and provide communal developments. Employees who have job satisfaction at work, display, and demonstrate those emotions to their organization and communities (Ali & Qazi, 2018).

This study discovered unsatisfied employees could affect organization continuity and leave organizations with gaps in experience, which leads to a loss of revenue. This study was imperative because participants were former employees from the last two decades, with over 175 years of federal service experience combined and leaders in their organizations. This study revealed when leaders and HR work together to develop programs and policies to reduce and retain employees, this fosters an environment that informs employees their job is important, they work in a pleasant environment. Their goals and wants are essential to the organization. These attributes not only assist the organization, but it also returns definite success to the surrounding communities, supporting, providing, and establishing a stable community. Understanding and communicating realistic programs, policies, and guidelines promote social change. Hence, organizations should teach leaders management approaches; that provide a constructive and creative environment for employees and future employees.

Conclusion

Identifying, understanding, and managing employee turnover is crucial for organizations; when employees depart, they take critical knowledge with them, which has operational and financial impacts on an organization; thus, monitoring and potentially

forecasting turnover is essential for organizations (Hongvichit, 2015). Internal turnover has drastic effects on an organization, decreased productivity and morale, lack of inventiveness or skillset to fill the gap, which leads to the organization not having a competitive advantage and more susceptible to vulnerabilities from outside entities (Alshanbri et al., 2015). Employee burnout often leads to heightened turnover intentions among employees (Guveli et al., 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore strategies that federal government agencies could use to reduce turnover rates within their organizations. The targeted population for this study was former GS federal employees located in various areas of the world. NVivo 12 was used to organize, develop the themes, gather data, and analyze methods; four themes emerged: job dissatisfaction, compensation and benefits, promotion and growth ability, and organizational leadership influences. Existing literature aligned with this study connecting concerns and strategies to reduce federal government employee turnover. Future recommendations include understanding the motivation factors of employees to increase job satisfaction, developing a better compensation package, developing and incorporating a sustainable and obtainable advancement process and develop, train, mentor leadership within the organization. These strategies could assist government agencies with developing influential leaders that can affect positive social change and decrease employee intention.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview preparation. Upon receiving approval from the Walden IRB, I will contact participants through social media with the criteria of study participants needed. After participants agreed to the interview, I will ask them to propose a convenient interview location and time.

Opening the interview. I will begin the interviews by greeting participants, introducing myself, and explaining the purpose of my study. I will thank participants for agreeing to the interview process, ensure they are comfortable and ask if they are ready to begin.

Informed consent. I will ask participants to e-mail “I consent”, to my original e-mail that has the consent form attached before beginning the interview. Participants know in advance that I will be recording the interview for transcription purposes. Before I begin the interview, I will activate the recording device and record in my voice, the date, time, name of the participant, and numeric code for analysis purposes.

Conducting the interview. The semi structured interview will comprise of open-ended questions (see Appendix B), for the complete list of questions. I will allow ample time for the participants to answer each question thoroughly. When necessary, I will ask followup probing questions for clarification.

Theme verification. I will ask participants about the major themes discussed in the interview to ensure I understand the intent of the participant's response.

Coding. I will use numeric coding to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. For example, I will code the first participant interview as participant one, or P1. I will code the second participant as P2, and so on for the remainder of the participants. For analysis purposes, I will maintain a list of the participants that linked their names with the coded number. I am the only person who has access to this list to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Recording reflexive notes. During the interview process, I will take notes to document any reflexive thoughts, including possible follow up probing questions that emerged during the interview.

Ending the interview. After the interview, participants will be thanked for their time and participation and informed that I will contact them at a later time to validate the accuracy of the data received and to engage in member checking to obtain additional information they might offer. I will reiterate that the contents of the interview will remain confidential and that the published study will not reveal the participant's name or the name of their company.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What factors caused you to depart federal service?
2. How do organizational challenges contribute to federal employees' voluntary turnover?
3. What organizational outcomes do you expect from reduced employee turnover?
4. What were your perceptions of egoistic relative deprivation within your organization?
5. What additional information can you provide about strategies federal government can use to reduce employee turnover?